

Characters

- CLAIRE
- ELETHA
- BELSY
- PETER
- NURSEL
- PIMPLY NURSE
- NANA
- PEPPEN
- BILLY
- YOUTHFUL COP
- CLERK
- COFFEE-DRINKER
- GEORGE

Act 1: Daddy Missing

Act One Daddy Missing

beautiful. Would look thirty if it weren't for her clothes. Though we are in the early 1970s, past those hippie years, she's dressed like a wealthy tight orange cashmere sweater matching a narrow orange-and-brown checkered skirt that ends just below her knees, a set of pearls, stockings (only Jackie Onassis dared to go without stockings away from the beach), high black heels, one of her small Gucci purses, of course bright orange-red lipstick. Pausing in front of the doorway, she opens up her purse, withdraws a mirror and a lipstick so she can check her mouth. Only after she's done this will she allow herself to see if anyone's around.

She hasn't as yet, as is her wont, noticed her daughter, ELECTRA.

ELECTRA is lurking. One of her more charming characteristics. She's part sitting, part slouching over, part disappearing into an armchair whose colors are more grey than not. Both the chair and she are almost in a corner; corners are her favorite spot because they remind her of prison, though she's prison. ELECTRA doesn't want to be visible and at the same time, she looks exactly like CLAIRE. Except for her coloring. CLAIRE's eyes are green and her hair is jetblack; ELECTRA, brown everywhere, has none of the pallor of her mother's perfect skin, and wears no lipstick. In fact, it's hard to notice what ELECTRA is wearing.

As usual, the latter is picking her lips.

The door, the one that leads to the outside, opens and BETSY walks in. A woman ten years older than Claire. Claire's best girlfriend. It's obvious that Betsy is rich, richer even than Claire, because she's wearing a thrift-store dress, the same sort of colorless stockings Claire wears, and low, black heels. This constitutes the uniform of "the girls"; women who wear designer clothing and let their wealth appear publicly are deemed "nouveau riche".

(still doing her lipstick):

As well as can be expected.

It's obvious that ELECTRA has left her private space to listen to all this closely because she's now slouching further into the chair, trying to be as in visible as she can.

TWO NURSES, chattering to each other, enter. They're young.

NURSE 1

(motioning toward Electra as if she's dead):

That's the daughter there ...

PIMPLY NURSE

(staring because she can't see properly, being nearsighted):

She looks exactly like the mother — though she isn't beautiful the way Mrs' Alexander is.

BETSY

(her voice loud enough to be heard in the inner room):

Claire, whatever you think, you have to admit that he's been a good husband to you.

CLAIRE

A lot of husbands could have been worse.

CLAIRE

I guess so.

BETSY

He took care of you and the kids....

CLAIRE

I guess so.

(*Putting away her lipstick, perks up*)

Let's go to La Rotonde for lunch.

BETSY

Oh good. The new chef there does the most marvelous crème brûlée. I'll even go off my diet.

(*They exit*)

PIMPLY NURSE

(*pointing to Betsy as she leaves*):

And that's the one whose husband owns Wall Street. Would you believe it?

NURSE 1

Same room, a bit later.

*There's nothing here that indicates change of weather or the passage of time.
Here, at the threshold of all which lies below.*

Since no one is now in this room except for ELECTRA, still sprawled out all over the armchair, she reads aloud from Kallimachos's Hymn to Apollo: "He who sees the god is great; he who does not see him is small."

PETER, a sexy but fattish rocker-type, enters from the exit door.

PETER

So is he here?

ELECTRA

Shhh.

(Points to where her father is. So they begin to whisper):

This is his third heart attack.

PETER

(earnestly):

Actually you're the one I'm looking for.

ELECTRA

I like it here.

What's going on, Peter?

PETER

Maybe now's the wrong time.

(*Changes his mind cause he can't help himself*)

Look.

ELECTRA

Don't start that.

PETER

You said to wait 'til I got money and now I do.

ELECTRA

(*disbelieving*):

How d'you get money?

PETER

I sold my book on John Lennon.

ELECTRA

I don't care about money.

PETER

That's a sick way to feel. You gotta let someone in.

ELECTRA

And there's daddy.

PETER

What d'ya mean?

ELECTRA

Just look at him.

PETER

Electra, your father has your mother to take care of him.

ELECTRA

That's what I told him that night ...

PETER

What night?

ELECTRA

Forget it. My father knows that he's all alone.

Why don't you ever listen to me? I don't want a husband. I want a brother. That's what I want. That's what you were to me before we had sex; if we were brother and sister, we would tell each other everything and nobody would or could ever come between us.

PETER

One day you'll grow up, Electra, and then you'll know what I'm feeling now. I'm gonna wait for you.

ELECTRA

I don't feel anything. All I know is I don't want to get married. I'm never gonna let anyone near me or let myself get close to anyone.

PETER looks at her. ELECTRA is looking off into space. She does this in order to make sure that no one can trespass into her private realm. She does this most of the time. As soon as ELECTRA's sure that this territory or herself is impenetrable, she speaks.

ELECTRA

You know what I want?

(If Peter really loved her, he'd give her everything she wanted. As it is, she doesn't wait for his reply)

I want my mother to have a lover.

PETER

Maybe you shouldn't talk so loud.

(*PETER starts tiptoeing toward the door to the inner room so that he can close it.*)

He's got to be like one of those older European guys, in the movies, I can't remember any of their names, gorgeous but slightly sleazy so that he can be sinister. He won't let her get away with anything; when she begins to act up, like she always does, he'll slap the shit out of her. That's the only thing that's gonna make her behave properly. Cause she's so desperate for sex and she never gets any.

PETER

(*accepting Electra's reality*):

How do you know?

ELECTRA

I was sound asleep and this huge scream woke me up, this was about four months ago, so my sister and I, now semi-awake, ran into my parents' bedroom and we saw Tinkerbell ...

PETER

Tinkerbell?

ELECTRA

My mother's ex-poodle hanging by my father's nipple. I think he was trying to bite through it. Tinkerbell was a he. Half the nipple was hanging off.

PETER

I mean, what had he done to make a poodle ...?

ELECTRA

(*understanding*):

Tinkerbell was protecting my mother cause my father had tried to kiss her.

PETER

What did your mother do?

ELECTRA

Nothing.

PETER

From this you concluded that your mother needs to be fucked....

ELECTRA

By an older guy.

PETER

By an older guy?

ELECTRA

I totally know what it's like to be regularly fucked by a guy who knows how to control you. My mother's either going to get hot sex, not just a one-night-stand

ELECTRA

Yes, they do.

PETER

And even if they do, your mother's not going to take one.

ELECTRA

We've got to make a plan.

(*She starts picking her lip.*)

PETER

Why?

ELECTRA

It's not going to happen otherwise. You already said that.

The PIMPLY NURSE walks from the exit to the inner room and enters it

PETER

(*trying to think*):

She could meet him at a dinner party.

ELECTRA

You've got to understand the difference between "nouveau riche" and mom's friends. Take Hope Legrand ...

PETER

She went to that private school with you ...

ELECTRA

Mommy just told me that Hope married this old guy — the kind of marriage my family wants me to make cause the guy'll die when I'm young enough to enjoy his money. When Hope married, her grandfather gave the couple a bank as a wedding present and then Hope had a baby who was ...

(*scratches her head*)

... mom said it served her right ... well Hope's mother, this is who I really want to tell you about, she belonged to the same beach club as us, she had dyed blonde hair and wore a bikini even though she was my mother's age. All that's "nouveau riche".

The PIMPLY NURSE exits from the interior room, carrying a bed pan

PETER

(*scratching his head*):

What's "nouveau riche"?

ELECTRA

Having money and showing your money off publicly is "nouveau riche". It

I know how my mother's going to find a man.

(*Pause*)

It'll be a dark night. The way the pavement looks wet in the city when all the lights are shining in it. Mommy will be so maddened by horniness, though of course she won't know what this is, that she'll tiptoe, with her high-heeled black shoes in her hand, past my father, fast-sleeping, into the dark hall, slowly open the door, the elevator man won't comment to her how late it is, down down into the night, where her lover will be waiting.

PETER

Where?

ELECTRA

Where a single car zooms around a corner .. the sound of high heels tapping on the concrete ... in the distance, a cop car siren ... my mother is walking down that street ...

PETER

... and goes into a bar.

ELECTRA

No. Mom would never go into a bar by herself.

(*Recognizing that her ability to deal with reality is now being tested; passing that test*)

ELECTRA

Where?

PETER

Where they are.

ELECTRA

They no longer know if there's anyone else around them because there's no one left in the world. Just them. The scenario I'm describing is only a metaphor for the following reality: he sweeps her off her feet and, by doing so, shows her who she is. So it doesn't matter how they meet.

PETER

What happens after they fuck?

ELECTRA

It doesn't matter.

PETER

What does he look like?

ELECTRA

(*ignoring Peter out of necessity*):

As soon as they've met, my mother begins to drink.

had a drink at the beach party a month ago, she instantaneously got down on her hands and knees and crawled over to one of her friend's husbands and licked his leg. When she's not drunk, she's always telling my father that he's he replies, "Claire, I've only taken one drink; I've worked all day." She tells him that he's worthless, he has a job only because he married into the family, all the wealth is on her side of the family. He tells her that he bought her her first mink coat. They go through this every single day.

(*Pauses. Peter doesn't say anything.*)

Leaving wherever they are, my mother and her lover go away to a room and fuck all night. He does things to her like spank her and call her his "petite chienne".

PETER

I guess it's a good thing to be drunk.

3

An apartment located in the richest section of New York City's Upper East Side. A small apartment — its interior reveals that its inhabitants aren't all that wealthy.

A narrow, dark green hall leads, on one side, to a large sunken living room, the largest room in the apartment.

All the sofas and chairs in this room, of which there are many, have silk exteriors; the clear plastic covers that CLAIRE explains are needed to protect the pale silks from stains are never taken off except when there are guests. There are a number of antiques including a captain's desk in which there places, a table whose inlaid pads are the color of ivy. A cabinet replete with

The dog's life is eating, sleeping and biting.

CLAIRE and NANA are standing next to a white armchair and looking down at the clothes spread out on the pink sofa that runs against the half-cross-shaped windowseat. Since Nana is family, the plastic is still on the silk. Claire's mother is eighty years old, more than of sound mind and body. She's as sharp as they come. A stroke has paralyzed one side of her face. She is still rather beautiful in an antiquated grande-dame style: the white hair, with lilac tinge, piled on top of her head is perfectly coiffed. So are her nails. The old lady's dress isn't as dingy as Betsy's, though it's the same style, for, disdaining stores because other humans shop in them, Nana has her own dressmaker.

NANA

Claire, you should be ashamed of yourself.

CLAIRE

What'd I do now?

(Flicking her cigarette)

NANA

Pfew!

(to the cigarette smoke)

You're going to kill yourself with those cigarettes, Claire.

(Pauses)

What do you call this?

(They both look down at the clothes on the couch. The white shopping bag that's sitting on the glass table in front of the couch says Saks Fifth Avenue

CLAIRE

What's the matter with them?

NANA

What's the matter with them? Claire.

(Walking over to the pink sofa and picking up a dress)

How could you even think of wearing something like this? Look where the hem is. Who do you think you are?

CLAIRE

I don't know.

ELECTRA sneaks down into the living room. Sneaks, because she's not allowed in there, over to a corner in front of the black banister that separates the hall from this room, but they're not noticing her, which she knows. She knows that, except when she's in danger, she doesn't exist.

NANA

Go back to the department store and tell them that you're sorry, you're returning them.

CLAIRE

(grinding out her half-smoked cigarette and lighting up another

I'll go on Thursday. OK?

NANA

It's not as if I didn't bring you up to know how to dress yourself decently.

CLAIRE

I said I'm going to return them Thursday. I have a lunch date with Betsy.

NANA

She knows how to dress herself. She got that magnificent silver fox at Roland's. I bet she paid next to nothing for it.

CLAIRE

That's a thrift store.

NANA

Betsy knows how to buy clothes.

ELECTRA, staying away from PEPPER, seats herself in a corner

CLAIRE

So what am I going to do about the dinner party this weekend? If Bud comes

What if he isn't home by then?

(*There's a pause.*)

Can I have a dinner party if he's not here?

NANA

You can't hold a dinner party while your husband's away.

CLAIRE

But what am I going to do about the caterer?

(*Electra starts picking her nose. Pepper doesn't know whether or not he smells food.*)

You know how hard it is to get this caterer ... it takes weeks to reserve him. He's the talk of the town. Plus Alice Harte's husband, you know Robert, can only come ...

NANA

You should have consulted me before you planned all this, Claire. I'm going to go home now.

CLAIRE

Mother ... Just stay for another half hour and the traffic'll have died down. You don't want to go cross-town in this traffic.

NANA

PEPPER growls at ELECTRA. She tries to move further back into the corner

NANA

He was a good husband to you, Claire. He took care of you and the kids.

CLAIRE

I know.

(Folding up the clothes, placing them in the white bag.)

I don't love him.

NANA

That's not what matters.

ELECTRA crawls out of the living room. She thinks about hiding under the dining room table and decides not to.

CLAIRE

Do you think I should get Liliane's to do those fabulous pastries they did for Beatrice's party?

(looking through her purse)

Oh damn. I've run out of diet pills again.

4

It's important to be a little girl
And to lie in your bed,
And all the men lie around you,
And all the men are dead.

BILLY enters through the outside door. Billy looks exactly like the person she dreams is her ideal brother of all time and is her real brother. He resembles Jimmy Dean. Some of his red hair falls over one eye and he's fat. Not exactly Jimmy Dean if reality has to matter. It doesn't. Since Jimmy Dean can't have sex with her brother.

ELECTRA

Hiya, Billy.

(Seeing that Claire is right behind him, she shuts up. Takes her legs and feet over the chair and places them on the ground where they belong

CLAIRE, in a black turtleneck and plaid kilt that stops an inch above her knees, is now stylish. She looks younger than she first looked.

CLAIRE

We've been looking all over for you.

ELECTRA

(having learned from Claire that a lie's use-value in no way depends on whether it's convincing or not):

I just got here.

I just like this room.

CLAIRE

What's there to like about a ... hospital?

(Now that the mother and daughter are close together, it becomes very obvious that they are physically alike. Rather than mother and daughter, they appear to be sisters. Except that Claire's lips are thinner and more elegant

ELECTRA

(looking closely at her mother):

You look good.

CLAIRE

Oh, let's get out of here. I don't like hospitals.

(She's returned to flirting, which is one of her three major modes of dealing or being.)

They're so ... depressing.

ELECTRA

(shutting her book which she never goes anywhere without — it doesn't matter which one):

Where can we go?

ELECTRA

It wasn't as if I was going anywhere. I didn't think I had to get dressed up, I was only going to a hospital.

CLAIRE

Well, someone might see you in a hospital. You have to learn to take more care of yourself. Look at Penelope Wormwood.

ELECTRA

Penelope is the class creep.

(*Closing her satchel*)

CLAIRE

At least tonight, try to wear something decent.

ELECTRA

Why tonight?

(*CLAIRE has already exited because it doesn't matter what her messy daughter says. BILLY is still occupied by boy stuff, peeking around the partly opened inner door, to the room that can't be seen. He wants to see what's inside and he doesn't want to be seen that he's doing this. Turning to BILLY*)

Why tonight?

BILLY

We do now.

ELECTRA

We don't have anyone. Just mommy and Nana.

BILLY

We do have an uncle. I don't know who he is.

ELECTRA

So why does he have to come to dinner?

BILLY

He's Nana's sister's child.

ELECTRA

So what. I still don't see why he has to interfere.

BILLY

Mommy said he's a famous geologist and even worked on the hydrogen bomb.

ELECTRA

That's all the more reason to have nothing to do with him. What else did she say?

BILLY

ELECTRA

What does that have to do with our uncle? Daddy's going to be well soon.

BILLY

... cause she doesn't know anything about business. And neither does Nana.

(Now totally speaking in Claire's voice, which he does sometimes

She doesn't know why everyone expects her to do everything by herself all the time.

ELECTRA

(giving up cause she can never successfully fight her mother for even one moment):

So who's this man?

BILLY

We gotta go.

ELECTRA

First, tell me what you know.

BILLY

(real quickly cause they gotta go):

The son opened the closet and saw.

ELECTRA

The son?

BILLY

So he remarried the Swiss girl who was crazy.

ELECTRA

Is she coming to dinner too?

BILLY

Those two never talk to each other. They live on separate floors in this mansion in a rich section of Cambridge where's there's never any light and lots of old American paintings which are hideous.

ELECTRA

And then there are brats?

BILLY

Three. Were. One ... or two ... died. One suicided. One has elephantiasis. He might not have died. They're the males.

ELECTRA

There's a girl?

matters more, why is she having this uncle to dinner? She doesn't give a damn about family plus we don't have any.

BILLY

He might stay with us a week or two till daddy comes home.

CLAIRE'S VOICE

Where are you two? I can't wait all day.

5

The Alexander apartment. Dinner. The dining room, or what passes for it, is at the end of the entrance hall, opposite the front door. Found between the sunken living room and the parents' bedroom. The walls here are green. Above the dining room table hangs an expensive chandelier. The dog is below

BILLY, CLAIRE, ELECTRA and FORD sit around the table. FORD is in the father's seat. They're eating steak, for they only eat steak in this house. There aren't many vegetables. Claire's reasoning is that since poor people eat vegetables, if you eat vegetables you're poor. Especially eggplant and collard greens. If you're poor, says Claire, you'll never have any friends and friends are the basis of life.

There's no wine at this table.

FORD is a reasonably tall, fairly heavy-set, middle-aged man. Good-looking according to those in his kind of social set. He's wearing glasses

The meal has been going on for several minutes, desultory conversation

ELECTRA

What do you mean, "a problem"? I'm going to get married.

CLAIRE

You know what I mean, Electra.

ELECTRA

(*Pauses*)

Oh. No, there isn't a problem. I just want to get married.

BILLY

Who are you going to marry?

(*Mumbles cause his mouth is stuffed full of very rare steak*)

CLAIRE

Listen to me, Electra. This isn't the first time something like this has happened. We'll just take care of things. It's nothing these days; you just disappear for two or three days; nobody'll notice a thing.

(*Thinking*)

It can be done cheaply. I know for a fact that Beatrice's niece ...

ELECTRA

ELECTRA

I was brought up fine.

BILLY

Can I be excused from the dinner table?

CLAIRE

No. Eat the rest of your steak.

(*To FORD, flirting*)

I don't know what I'm supposed to do with these children. They have no respect for me; they love me, but they have no respect for me.

FORD

(*one of his hands patting one of hers*):

You've done a fine job!

CLAIRE

I've done my best. That's all I can say.

(*ELECTRA's looking down at her dinner plate.*)

ELECTRA

(*defiantly*):

Peter Wolf.

CLAIRE

Who's that?

ELECTRA

He's a boy.

(*Silence*)

He came to the hospital.

CLAIRE

You're too young to get married.

ELECTRA

I have to do something.

CLAIRE

(*exasperated and forgetting FORD's presence*):

I don't understand what you're talking about.

BILLY

I do.

You know better than to talk about nasty things at the dinner table. And in front of strangers.

BILLY examines one of the wrists.

FORD

I have three children. Children just don't do what they're supposed to do despite all that we put into them.

CLAIRE

Well, I've done my best whatever anyone says.

FORD

And having a husband in the hospital. It must be hard.

CLAIRE

I just don't know how to be when I'm alone.

FORD

Well, we can do something about that.

BILLY

What about daddy?

They all look at him.

One day I will come home again,
One day I'll have a home.

Act 2: Portrait of Mommy

Act 2: Portrait of Mommy, Scene 1: Funeral

Act Two Portrait of Mommy Part One: Funeral

1

The children's bedroom in the Alexander apartment. Unlike the dark green of the rest of the apartment, these walls are light green. It is obvious that two children inhabit this space, for there are two beds so narrow they could be in prisons placed against opposite walls, two long and narrow bookcases, painted the same light green, against the other two walls. BILLY's territory looks like ELECTRA's. Here nothing can be seen because it's dark.

ELECTRA

(safe under the cover of her bed so she's masturbating. Slipping her fingers out her mouth ...):

Tastes just like Oreo cookies, the vanilla that's in between ... I want to be there where it's vanilla ...

CLAIRE's VOICE

Electra!

ELECTRA

back and in the right side wall of the room. Even though the maid cleans every day, these panes are dirty.

Other than this light, the living room is the same as before. Here nothing ever changes except when Claire entertains.

CLAIRE is crawling across the living room floor. ELECTRA watches her. The former is clothed; she usually isn't when no one is around.

CLAIRE

I have to call the doctor. I ran out of diet pills.

ELECTRA just watches. Her mother continues crawling across the ivory rug, up the two stairs that lead from the sunken living room to the hall, across the next bit of carpet to the kitchen. This room is smaller than the children's bathroom, but that doesn't matter. When she has to cook an egg, Claire places it under a broiler.

CLAIRE stands up, reaches for the phone that's hanging off the edge of the kitchen wall, and dials.

CLAIRE

Dr. Salmon, please.

ELECTRA, off and on, examines her fingernails.

CLAIRE

I have to speak to the doctor now.

Look, this is Mrs' Alexander and I must speak to the doctor now.

ELECTRA makes no movement one way or the other.

CLAIRE

Dr' Salmon ... Claire Alexander ... yes ... you know Bud's prescription for librium ... he just got out of the hospital ... as soon as possible ... I understand ... plus I need more pills.

Bored, ELECTRA turns away and walks toward one of the windows through which light is streaming. CLAIRE hangs up the phone.

CLAIRE

Electra, I don't want you to say anything about this to Nana.

ELECTRA

There's nothing to say anything about.

CLAIRE

(becoming a girl, one of her principal modes of being):

Let's play a game of canasta.

ELECTRA

Is daddy coming home soon?

CLAIRE

CLAIRE reaches for the deck of cards that's always on her bedside table and shuffles them pro-style.

ELECTRA

(sensing that her mother's in a good mood since she knows she's going to get her drugs):

Mommy ... How come you never talk about my childhood? My really early childhood?

CLAIRE

There's nothing to talk about.

ELECTRA

There must be something. I'd just like to know.

CLAIRE

(completely absorbed in the card game):

I never wanted to have a child. It was a mistake.

ELECTRA

Are you talking about me?

CLAIRE

There was something wrong with me. Our doctor couldn't figure out what it was,

It was wartime. I got pregnant.

ELECTRA

What about your disease?

CLAIRE

I wanted to have an abortion, but I was too frightened. Women didn't do that in those days.

(Lifting her face up from the cards and looking at her daughter)

ELECTRA

I told you. I'm not pregnant.

CLAIRE

The day after I had you, I came down with appendicitis.

ELECTRA

(figuring it out):

Oh.

CLAIRE

You only weighed about 5½ pounds. You were premature.

They play cards for a bit.

(her mind taken up by the cards, as much as it can be taken up by anything

What about daddy?

ELECTRA

Did daddy want you to abort me?

CLAIRE

He wasn't there.

ELECTRA

What do you mean?

CLAIRE

(evasively):

It was wartime.

ELECTRA

(trying to understand reality):

Daddy said that he really enjoyed the war: he was on some island in the Pacific and there wasn't even a day of fighting. He had the time of his life.

CLAIRE

Not that one.

ELECTRA

Am I legitimate?

CLAIRE

Your father came from a very good family.

ELECTRA

(*breathes*):

At least I'm legitimate.

(*Thinks*)

So that's why when daddy did my homework in third grade, I got D's and when I did it, I got A's.

CLAIRE

We don't talk about your real father.

(*She returns to the cards. Her ashtray is overflowing with cigarettes*

ELECTRA

Why? Did he murder someone?

CLAIRE

Oh, Betsy's supposed to call me.

(*because she always goes where she's not supposed to*):

What was his name?

CLAIRE

He came from a good family. They were richer than ours. I fell in love with his parents.

ELECTRA

Then why d'you marry him?

CLAIRE

It was at the end of the war. Everyone was doing it.

ELECTRA

(*trying to understand reality*):

I was born just when the war stopped.

CLAIRE

He walked out when I was three months' pregnant; he never came back.

ELECTRA

Were you in love with him?

CLAIRE

You know the commercial, "Wild Root Cream Oil, Charley"? They owned the company. Among others. This is the last time we're going to mention any of this, Electra.

Realizing that a limit has just been passed, ELECTRA picks her nose. CLAIRE returns to the world of cards.

ELECTRA

It's your turn.

CLAIRE

Who are you going to see on Saturday?

ELECTRA

Cherry.

CLAIRE

I don't like her, Electra. Her father runs an abortion mill.

3

ELECTRA and CHERRY are at Cherry's parents' house, an apartment on upper Fifth Avenue. Cherry's parents have money.

CHERRY is a wild girl so ELECTRA is in love with her. The former wouldn't have anything to do with a boy even if you paid her.

They're both curling up on a huge white-silk-quilt-covered bed. A bed which is a

ELECTRA

No way.

(*Slight pause*)

I just want to get away from them.

CHERRY

My dad bugs me.

ELECTRA

(*not really listening*):

Mine's stupid.

CHERRY

(*fingering the lace more*):

I dunno.

ELECTRA

What don't you know?

CHERRY

If I should serve his mistress breakfast in bed.

If I don't, dad won't let me go out and he won't buy me any clothes. Wendy told me that when her parents have orgies, they make her be there.

ELECTRA

I guess my parents are normal. Considering the parents of all the girls I know.

CHERRY

What do you think I should do?

ELECTRA

About serving your father breakfast in bed?

(*Cherry sighs*)

You could run away. I'd like to run away. Men aren't right. When I was eight or nine, I walked into my parents' bathroom. I didn't know anyone was in there. My father was naked. I guess he had been going to the bathroom. I had never seen a man before. He looked so weird ... I mean, that thing sticking up ... it didn't go with the body ... bodies should be smooth and go one way. You know, up and down. But it went opposite. Then my mother yelled at me for going into their bathroom without knocking.

CHERRY

My father always walks around naked.

ELECTRA

That's normal. Oh, I remember one other thing. When I was really young ... I

anyone else.

ELECTRA

Gosh. My dad's really kind only my mother keeps tormenting him. Yesterday she showed me, right in front of him, the birthday card she had bought him, you know? One of those joke birthday cards which said on the front "I would have sent you a camping tent for your birthday ..." and inside, "... but you up!" I laughed so my mother turned to me. "How do you know what it means, Electra?" I didn't reply.

CHERRY

Isn't your father in the hospital?

ELECTRA

He's lonely.

CHERRY

I wish I had your father.

4

The dark green foyer in the Alexander apartment. ELECTRA and BILLY are sitting at the dining room table; they're playing a game. Both of them look up as CLAIRE walks through the front door.

CLAIRE

Your father's dead.

I have to arrange for the funeral. It has to happen within three days. I have to call Betsy, Ellen ... Erma, Alice ... who else? ... Beatrice is out of town ... I'm not going to ask Louise ... And daddy's business partners have to be told.

(*Reaching for the phone and dialing*)

Mother?

ELECTRA

(*putting her arms around her brother*):

Are you OK, Billy?

BILLY

(*sniffling*):

He was all right.

ELECTRA

He was kind. He gave me fifty dollars once when I asked for it though mom made me give it back.

BILLY

(*crying*):

I thought he was going to get well.

ELECTRA

(*Back to NANA*)

Mother, I'm telling you ... wait a second, I have to change phones so the children don't hear ... yes, they're upset ...

(*Letting the phone dangle, walks into the other room*)

ELECTRA

Billy, don't cry. Please. He didn't have a happy life.

BILLY

He never hurt any of us. Even if he was stupid.

ELECTRA

Yeah, he was kind of stupid.

BILLY

He wasn't as bad as she said he was.

ELECTRA

He was good. At the end, he was totally lost. When I saw him yesterday, he said to me that he had lived as he had been taught to, he had worked hard, been honest, and now he realized that everything he had been taught and believed didn't matter.

BILLY

The same foyer in the Alexander apartment two days later. There are people everywhere. Hors d'oeuvres load down the dining room table; liquor bottles stand on a wood cabinet against the opposite wall.

The guests, who are white, hold drinks. CLAIRE's GIRLFRIENDS, mostly in their fifties, one or two older, are dowdy as only the rich can be. A few wear husbands.

Unlike the girls, Bud's business associates, well dressed in quiet suits, talk in such low tones they can barely be heard.

ELLEN is thinner than the other girls; otherwise she looks like them

BETSY

(to Ellen):

I said to her, "Look, Louise. Kids today don't turn out well. You should feel fortunate that Gordon isn't a junky or in jail."

ELLEN

Thank God, our children aren't like that.

BETSY

You can never tell. That's one thing I've learned. You just never know about someone else's family.

ELLEN

Where are the children? I haven't seen Electra all day.

warmth.

CLAIRE

(coming up and laughing, a drink in her hand):

Are you talking about me again?

ELLEN

(laying her hand on Claire's):

Oh, Claire. I'm so sorry. What can I do?

CLAIRE

(still laughing):

I'll be fine.

(Looking a round her)

Do you think there are enough drinks?

BETSY

It's a wonderful party, Claire.

CLAIRE

I haven't seen Electra all day.

BILLY walks in; she looks up.

ELECTRA

I've got her blood in me so I'm going to become insane.

BILLY

Mommy's looking for you.

ELECTRA

It's not as if there's anywhere to hide.

BILLY

Electra. It's daddy's funeral.

ELECTRA

Look at the people out there. They don't care anything about his death. They're just doing what they always do. The girls're probably going to start a card game after the rest of them go.

BILLY

Mommy and Betsy are going to get a game together. What's the matter with that?

ELECTRA

No one understands. I saw mommy at the hospital. She was standing right at the edge of daddy's room. Betsy was telling her that she had never loved him. She

ELECTRA

He was kind to me, which mommy never is.

BILLY

But you wouldn't let him kiss you.

ELECTRA

That was cause ...

(wrapping her legs around each other in eights)

... It's not like he tried to rape me ...

BILLY

(keeps looking toward the door so he's not interested in what new garbage Electra is coming up with) .

Uh.

ELECTRA

I was with Peter ... it was when you were all at the summer house ... I didn't think daddy was supposed to be in town ... but he was.

Neither ELECTRA nor BILLY is really noticing the other.

ELECTRA

He's an alcoholic.

ELECTRA

While I was leaving, I snuck Peter out of the apartment. Daddy found Peter's tie in the bathtub. When I got back, he accused me ... of, well, what we had been doing ... I of course denied everything.

BILLY

I saw you once naked with that boy from Yale in the living room.

ELECTRA

You didn't.

BILLY

I always used to watch you when you were with boys. Once I followed you.

ELECTRA

"Boys don't respect you." That's what daddy said. He was crying. "They have no respect for you. You need to go with someone who'll take care of you and respect you. I'm the only one who can protect you." One of his hands went for my breast.

BILLY

We have to go to mommy.

ELECTRA

ELECTRA

... or else I was never going to see either of them again. She told me to put him on the phone. When he handed the phone back to me, she said, "Electra, you can stay the night there. Everything's going to be OK."

BILLY

(walking over to Electra and pulling her hand):

Let's go. Now.

ELECTRA

No one ever mentioned what had happened again.

BILLY is pulling ELECTRA off the bed.

CLAIRE'S VOICE

Children!

BILLY

See. Mommy's calling.

ELECTRA sings

In the deep of the dark or dying,
I heard a voice say,
"Never never
"Take the soul away."

has changed .

The door rings. CLAIRE runs out of her bedroom toward it. She looks younger than ever possibly due to her clothes: she's now very fashionable in a black designer dress and low black shoes. It's the little girl look understated

CLAIRE

Shit.

(Bends down and slips back on her shoe that in her haste she didn't stick her heel into. Stands up and opens the door.)

ELECTRA is standing there in what she thinks is clothing her mother will approve of. Having the proper background, she knows how to dress, yet it's obvious that she has no money. Her hair is the same as it was two years ago

CLAIRE

I was hoping you'd get here early.

ELECTRA

Why?

(Steps into the apartment and looks around her curiously)

CLAIRE

We're going to meet Nana for lunch; she hasn't seen you for ages.

ELECTRA

Horn 'n Hardart's. Oh no. Do we have to?

CLAIRE

You know that Nana adores their rice pudding. She's getting old, Electra, and she likes rice pudding.

ELECTRA

Horn 'n Hardart's is OK.

CLAIRE

Are you going to come here for Christmas?

ELECTRA

Oh ... I forgot. It's almost Christmas.

CLAIRE

Billy'll be here with his wife and the new kid, and Nana; it'll be the first time the family's together since daddy's death.

ELECTRA

I didn't know you cared about family.

CLAIRE

We're all we've got, Electra. We've got to stick together.

ELECTRA

What do I want for Christmas? You've never asked me what I want for Christmas. Not since I was a kid.

CLAIRE

I am now. I want there to be lots of Christmas presents under the tree just like when you were children

ELECTRA

(*considering*):

Uh ... I don't know ... I guess there's lots I could use.

CLAIRE

I don't want to know what you could use. I want to know what you want.

ELECTRA

(*eating her ponytail more*):

I guess I can come up with something.

CLAIRE

Tell me soon so I can have the time to find it.

ELECTRA

You're asking me? Aren't we going to Horn 'n Hardart's?

CLAIRE

I forgot.

(Looking down at her watch)

Damn. Let me call Nana and tell her that we're going to be late.

(Doesn't stop talking while she dials the phone)

Do you think I should make reservations cause we're late?

ELECTRA

You can't make reservations at a dump.

CLAIRE

Mother ...

While she yaps on the phone, ELECTRA prowls around the apartment. She ends up peeking into the hall closet, where she used to find pornography and Agatha Christie when she was a kid, and sees seven versions, in seven different colors, of the same coat. Stuck in all the furs.

ELECTRA

Mommy ...

(Waits until Claire hangs up the phone)

Oh.

CLAIRE

Nana isn't feeling well.

ELECTRA

Is she ill?

CLAIRE

Her hangnail's bothering her again. The podiatrist is going to be at her hotel room at 3:00.

ELECTRA

Then we don't have to eat at Horn 'n Hardart's.

CLAIRE

I'm not hungry anymore.

(Sitting in a dining room chair and lighting up a cigarette)

Why don't we go on a double-date sometime?

ELECTRA

You mean ... you and me?

CLAIRE

CLAIRE

Go to a movie. Then we can go out dancing. There're all these new clubs that just opened. You must know about them.

ELECTRA

I didn't know you had a boyfriend.

CLAIRE

I met him after daddy died.

ELECTRA

That's cool that you have a boyfriend. Uh. What does he do?

CLAIRE

He worked in daddy's office.

ELECTRA

Yeah ... It'd be great to double-date. If you're not going to eat, I've got to get some food. I'm starving.

CLAIRE

I'll come with you. I could use a bite to eat. Let me get a coat ...

2

to shut up. He yells at her so she kicks him.

ELECTRA

What're we going to get mom for Christmas?

BILLY

I don't know. She has everything.

A SALVATION ARMY WOMAN rings a bell and starts singing a Christmas hymn. Everything, air and color, is heralding Christmas so the children do too, no longer caring how grubby everyone on the streets is, how every time you touch any part of this city, it falls into pieces.

ELECTRA

Let's go to Bloomingdale's and see what's there. There has to be something.

BILLY

She's buying herself whatever she wants these days.

ELECTRA

Why shouldn't she? When he was alive, daddy never let her have anything. Remember that closet with the same old clothes, year after year?

BILLY

All her friends wear thrift-store clothes.

ELECTRA

She didn't have any money.

BILLY

That can't be true. All of the money was on our side of the family. Daddy married into the fortune.

ELECTRA

What really happened was that when grandfather died, he left half of his money to his wife and half to mommy. Even though she was married to daddy, mommy turned around and gave her share of the money back to Nana so that Nana would keep supporting her. This is why mom hasn't had any money until now.

BILLY

It doesn't make sense. Look how she's spending money now that daddy's dead.

ELECTRA

She's always spent every cent she could.

BILLY

Next week she's giving a dinner party for forty at The Top of the Sixes. And she's ordered lamb shanks.

ELECTRA

How much can one dinner party cost?

BILLY

What about the boyfriend?

ELECTRA

Oh, you know about the boyfriend too? Have you met him?

BILLY

No.

3

A week before Christmas. A suite in an expensive New York City hotel which is now semi-residential. It consists of three rooms: bedroom, living room, and study plus two half rooms, bathroom and kitchen. The wonders of the world live in the three rooms. A giant pearl nestling in poisonous liquids. Three ivory fans, each three layers thick, each layer carved into images that narrate a different fairytale. An encyclopedia sitting in the lower shelves of the bookcase that lines one wall of the study or den contains all of the wisdom of seven countries in the world in pictures; the pillows on the pale yellow silk sofa in the living room are so high that when anyone sits on one, that person falls to the center of the earth. Each page of the notebook that's lying on top of a cracked writing desk shows a language that can't be deciphered. Each language is different from every other language.

CLAIRE and NANA are standing in the living room, whose walls are pale grey. NANA is frailer than she was, but it can be seen from her face that her spirit is indomitable.

between fingers of the other hand.)

NANA

I told you to get rid of those cigarettes. You're killing yourself, Claire.

(*Pauses*)

I can't give you any more money until you return the diamonds.

CLAIRE

Mother, you're getting old. You probably put the diamonds in your safe-deposit box and forgot about it.

NANA

I know very well what I do with my diamonds, Claire. They were here and now they're gone.

CLAIRE

The cleaning lady must have taken them.

NANA

She's never taken anything. The hotel wouldn't allow such a thing. I've given you everything you've ever wanted your whole life; why didn't you ask me if you needed money?

CLAIRE

Bud left me with enough money.

NANA

He didn't leave you with anything. He never had a penny. He was a good-for-nothing.

CLAIRE

I did ask you.

NANA

I would have given if you had asked me, but I won't give anymore.

CLAIRE

What am I going to do?

NANA

Don't come running to me, Claire. You've burnt your bridges. I don't know what you're going to do, but you can't come running to me after what you've done.

CLAIRE

I'm going, mother.

NANA doesn't say a thing.

4

The CLERK is young and fairly good-looking.

CLERK

Will there be any luggage, Mrs' ...

(looks down at the slip)

... Weil?

CLAIRE

The luggage will be arriving later.

5

Christmas. The inside of a cop station .

There aren't a lot of cops here. The walls, however, are pale yellow and pale grey, the colors of Nana's apartment .

A COP at a desk, a young crew-cut type, is yapping to an older one who's drinking coffee. A third walks back and forth, from a door that's in the back of the room up to the desk in the front of the room and back again .

The room resembles the one in the hospital in the following sense: the door in its back leads to what can't be seen. In this case, to the beginning of a hall. The exit door lies in the front. In other words: another waiting room .

ELECTRA, wearing her oversized leather jacket, jeans, scarf, and gloves (she disdains hats) walks through the front door. Having no idea where she's going and what's happening, walks up to the desk .

That's me.

ELECTRA

My name's Electra Alexander.

YOUTHFUL COP

(*looking through his papers*):

Oh yeah. You're the dead body.

THIRD COP

(*walking by with his coat on*):

Have a merry Christmas, Ag'

YOUTHFUL COP

(*to Third Cop*):

I want to be leaving too.

(*To Electra*)

Let's get this over with quickly cause it's Christmas. Everyone else is home where it's warm with their families.

ELECTRA

My mother's been missing for a week.

YOUTHFUL COP

This one isn't pretty.

COFFEE-DRINKER

Follow me. It's a little cold in there so you'd better bundle up.

ELECTRA follows the COFFEE-DRINKER, the big kind fatherly type, through the back door and into what seems to be a hall.

At the doorway, the COFFEE-DRINKER leaves her.

COFFEE-DRINKER

Just down the hall and to the left. Someone will meet you at the doorway.

The YOUTHFUL COP is alone in the room. He fingers his coat.

ELECTRA'S VOICE

No!

ELECTRA appears in the doorway. Her arms are wrapped around her body. She walks up to OFFICER MEMNON.

ELECTRA

It's her.

YOUTHFUL COP

YOUTHFUL COP

Married?

ELECTRA

What happened?

YOUTHFUL COP

We don't know.

ELECTRA

Aren't you going to find out?

YOUTHFUL COP

We found a bottle of pills by her body.

ELECTRA

I don't understand.

YOUTHFUL COP

But it wasn't suicide.

ELECTRA

How come? What else could it be?

With all the murders in this city, by the time we got around to an autopsy, there'd be no evidence left.

ELECTRA

Is there any way you can know anything?

YOUTHFUL COP

Just give me the name of her husband and you can go.

ELECTRA

He's dead.

ELECTRA sings

In the deep of the dark or dying.

I heard a voice say,

"Never never

"Take the soul away."

All that is pain

Remains as pain.

Let it go.

The night is still the same.

The night is where we wander,

Where we have no friends,

But who am I in night-time

Where space has no end?

Who puts her lips upon that cheek,
Her arms around that neck.

All that is pain
Remains as pain;
Let it go;
The night is still the same.

In the deep of the dark or dying,
I heard a voice say,
"Never never
"Take the soul away."

Act 3: Requiem

Act Three: Requiem

1

*ELECTRA's monologue. ELECTRA enters and sits cross-legged upon the stage.
Just the actress as she is, no need to dress up anymore. It's present time*

ELECTRA

I want to tell you about myself.

(*A little like a kid*)

I'd been seeing a woman who can trace past lives.
When I found out I had cancer, a cancer that had metastasized, I ran to her for
help.

whose job is to filter,
were just doing their task?
For six weeks I've been on a high antioxidant diet."

(*Now picking at my toes*)

"Alas,"
replied my surgeon,
"diet has nothing to do with cancer, the causes of cancer. Nor does environmental
pollution. We've no idea what causes malignant growth."

I knew, at this moment, that he knew nothing about cancer.
I knew I would have to find out who in the world did know something about
cancer. Who did know something.
I knew I had no idea how to find out.

What I had believed to be reality
had just been taken away from me.

I was alone.
No longer trusting anyone
I knew, I ran to my past-life adviser, George. Told her everything that had just
happened.
I said, "George, the surgeon was really good-looking. Like President Clinton.
They must be in the same racket."
George warned, "Electra ... Don't go on
being a scaredy-cat.
Anyway cancer's not the problem."
"What do you mean?"
"I know someone who kills cancers. You'll go to him."

If only I could think enough, if only I could think hard enough ...
I thought: Either events are caused or not.
If not, then might as well become
a sot
or junky.
If not, we are flunkies
to chance — which we,
mistakenly,
call "time" —
trying to find meaning where there is none.

This is not bearable.

Thought is willed: I willed:
my death and so my life
will be meaningful.

My death and so my life
must be meaningful.

At this moment, thought died in my brain.
Something larger than me rose up inside me
and screamed without using my voice,
"No more of death. Again
no more death.
You fucked up everything
so now I'm doing the acting."

It must be
that every finger, ring and stone,

Fear is growing so rapidly in this world.
There has to be something other than fear.
There has to be something else.

I ran to George
before fear could eat up my breath.
"George, I'm scared to death I'm going to die."
"Why?" she replied.
"Why, Electra, are you so scared?"
"What do you mean?"
"Were you scared before you had cancer?"
"Yes."

I said this rapidly
and then I began to know:
I was six years old
(I don't remember anything that happened to me before this age.) I was standing
in the bathtub under the shower.
My mother walked in. I couldn't see her:
the shower curtain between us.
She threw ice water over me; I slipped
on a bar of soap she had left on the bathtub floor.

I was a kid. I knew it
was another of her games.

Why don't I remember anything that happened to me before I was this age?

married to a well-known American film producer.

They are already in conversation.

ELECTRA

So I went to this dingdong doctor and she made me hold vials of different cancers in one hand while her hands tapped and sort of moved my feet. She said, "You don't register at all for breast cancer. " "Maybe I'm cured. " "But you have six other kinds of cancer. " I think I'd know if I was growing every kind of cancer.

GEORGE

Forget about her.

ELECTRA

While I was holding each group of vials — there were fourteen — she told me to hold the thumb of my other hand, for each test, against a different finger. Each time my thumb touched my third finger, she found all these really bad emotions. She named each emotion, then told me to think about it and hit the base of my skull with that tool they use to adjust backs. A "clicker" or something or other. As soon as my head really hurt, I told her I had thought about the emotion.

GEORGE

Don't see her again.

ELECTRA

The most usual emotion was anger. I want to learn about this cause I don't think

I don't know, but I don't know how I felt before I was six.

GEORGE

What's the first thing that you remember?

ELECTRA

I do remember one thing that happened before I was six. I was about a year old. I had this pink baby blanket with roses. I adored it. They took it away from me. They said they were taking it away to clean it, but I never got it back.

GEORGE

Now, be a child. Sit in a chair or on the floor as if you were a child.

ELECTRA

George.

(Readily sitting down on the floor, her legs away from the rest of her body

This is silly!

GEORGE

What toy do you want?

ELECTRA pouts.

GEORGE

Which one?

ELECTRA

Both.

GEORGE

Go back to that blanket. To it being taken away. Where are you?

ELECTRA

I don't know.

(*She closes her eyes.*)

A bare room. Grey walls. I see a crib. I can't see anything else.

GEORGE

Who's taking your blanket away?

ELECTRA

They are.

GEORGE

Your grandmother? She's obviously the one who took care of you.

ELECTRA

I adored my nurses. It was my mother or my grandmother.

GEORGE

What do you feel?

ELECTRA

I'm really angry.

GEORGE

Do you show your mother you're angry?

ELECTRA

No.

(*Thinks*)

My mother was a monster. I wouldn't have dared.

GEORGE

Why? Children usually show their mothers how they feel.

ELECTRA doesn't answer.

GEORGE

What were you so scared she was going to do to you?

(*Reasons*)

They're going to make me into nothing. To make me a puddle so I can be just what they want. Then I'll no longer be. That was what their society was to me: The fifties and the sixties. Hypocrisy.

GEORGE

I don't understand.

ELECTRA

I was constantly supposed to say to my mother, "I love you." I wouldn't because I didn't know if she loved me. My father would say, "Why don't you tell your mother you love her? She loves you so much." I was guilty. When I was six, I would tiptoe up to the doorway of their bedroom; it was always late could hear them talking about me. My mother said that there was something bad about me that genetics couldn't account for and my father would agree. He agreed with everything she said. They talked about how maybe I should be instituted.

GEORGE

How did that make you feel?

ELECTRA

I was unlike everyone in the world. I decided I was a freak. So my mind made up another world: that's when I began to live in the imagination.

GEORGE

I've got to remember because I have to cure this disease.

GEORGE

Go back further.

ELECTRA

I'm trying. I'm going to look at my fears. Lobotomy. Fire. I'm terrified of fire. Which doesn't make sense cause I'm basically fearless: knives, guns don't bother me; when I was a kid, I used to jump off the boardwalk over the beach. It was high.

GEORGE

Why are you scared of fire?

ELECTRA shrugs.

GEORGE

If you were badly burned during childhood, you'd have a scar.

ELECTRA

I don't have a scar. I'm scared of fire.

GEORGE

Let's go back to lobotomy. Your mother doesn't want you to be you.

ELECTRA

ELECTRA

She always tells me that. That she would have gotten an abortion if she hadn't been scared.

GEORGE

She tried to kill you.

ELECTRA

I don't remember.

(*Blocking*)

Let's ask the healers.

GEORGE

Dear healers, please be with us now and answer my and Electra's questions about her mother. Did Electra's mother try to kill her?

ELECTRA is sitting in her child's position, rigid.

GEORGE

Yes.

Did Electra's mother try to burn her when she was a child?

No.

Did Electra's mother try to kill her before she was born?

Yes.

When she was three months in the womb?

The abortion didn't work because you were meant to be born. You were helpless when all this happened. That's why you're scared.

ELECTRA

What do I do?

GEORGE

May you go back to that child who existed before your mother tried to abort her,
so that she can grow up in love.
Give her the help that she needs
to do what she has to do
while alive. Amen.

ELECTRA sings in a clear, strong child's voice:

"Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels?"

I know the answer:
no one.

Tell me: from where does love come?
An angel is sitting on my face. To whom can I run?

Take me in your arms, death,
I'm so scared;
do anything to me that will make me safe
while I kick my heels and shout out in total fear,
while we hurtle through your crags
to where it's blacker:

"Every angel is terrifying."
Because of this, because I have met death,
I must keep my death in me,
gently,
and yet go on living.
Because of this, because I have met my death,
I give myself birth.

Remember that Persephone
raped by Hades
then by him brought
into the Kingdom of Death
there gave birth
to Dionysius.

You were the terrorized child,
Mother,
Not me.
Now be no more.
Requiescas in pacem.

Tell me: from where does love come?

"Emerging at last from violent insight
"Sing out in jubilation and in praise,"
To the angels who terrified away the night.
Let not one string
of my forever-child's heart and cunt fail to sing.
Open up this body half in the realm of life, half in death and give breath.

Requiescas in pacem.

Requiem.

For it was you I loved.